

INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM HUTCHINSON
BY DOROTHE NORTON, NOVEMBER 10, 2003
NORTHFIELD, MINNESOTA

MS. NORTON: Good morning! This is Monday, November 10, 2003 in Northfield, Minnesota. This interview will be between William "Bill" Hutchinson formerly of Refuges and Dorothe Norton. Thank you! Bill, we are going to start this interview now. You can say whatever you want. If you don't remember something, that's okay. If you do, you can say whatever, even if it's derogatory. It goes into the Archives after it is transcribed by a temporary service in Shepherdstown, WV. Next April, during the last weekend, we will have all FWS retirees' reunion at Shepherdstown. Have you been to the Training Center?

MR. HUTCHINSON: No, I've never made it.

MS. NORTON: Oh, it's so peaceful there, and so nice! I hope you can make it. The first thing I want to know is your birthplace and date.

MR. HUTCHINSON: I was born in Cass City, Michigan.

MS. NORTON: Where is that?

MR. HUTCHINSON: It's up in the thumb of Michigan. My birthday is October 12, 1945.

MS. NORTON: Boy, you're young! What were your parents' names, their education and jobs?

MR. HUTCHINSON: My parents were Grant and Mary. They both went through high school. My dad was a farmer and mom was a housewife. She worked in a clothing store in town too.

MS. NORTON: So you spent all of your early years in Michigan?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yes.

MS. NORTON: What did you do? Did you have any special hobbies, or books or events or games that you liked?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Well growing up on a farm we hunted and fished a lot. There was nothing special.

MS. NORTON: Did you dad teaching you the hunting and fishing?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yes.

MS. NORTON: At an early age? And you liked it?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yeah, pretty early. Sure!

MS. NORTON: Did you ever have a job as a child, before you graduated; like a paper route or working at a grocery store?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Other than working on the farm, just before I went to college I worked for the County mowing road sides one summer. The next summer I worked in a factory welding. I knew then and there that I didn't want to do that!

MS. NORTON: What high school did you go to?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Cass City High School. I graduated in 1963.

MS. NORTON: Did you go from there on to college? And if so, what college did you go to?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I started at Central Michigan. I went there for two years and transferred to Michigan State and finished there. Michigan State is in East Lansing, Michigan.

MS. NORTON: What degrees did you get?

MR. HUTCHINSON: A B. S. in Wildlife Management. I didn't go on for a Masters or anything.

MS. NORTON: What aspect of your formal education equipped you for the future? Was it just the fact that your degree was in Wildlife Management?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Pretty much, yeah. They didn't have many "people" classes, and that's what you need; to learn how to deal with people. If you could just deal with wildlife it would be great, but unfortunately you can't.

MS. NORTON: Who do you think most influenced your education and your career track? Did you have mentors, or courses that especially stuck with you?

MR. HUTCHINSON: It seems like I always wanted to be a Refuge Manager from as early as I can remember. I enjoyed Biology and the teacher I had for that. I had a couple classes from him.

MS. NORTON: Did your dad encourage you to go on to college and get a degree?

MR. HUTCHINSON: No, not really. I suppose Mr. Strickland who was my Biology teacher kind of inspired me.

MS. NORTON: So you yourself had an urge to do it, and you did! That's important. Were you ever in the military service?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yep. I was in the Army. I was in from November 1968 to October of 1970.

MS. NORTON: Where did you take your basic training?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Fort Knox.

MS. NORTON: Where did you go from there?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I went to Fort Polk, and Fort Benning. Benning is in Georgia. I think Polk is too. I ended up in Vietnam.

MS. NORTON: Did you get any decorations from your service over there?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I got a couple Purple Hearts.

MR. NORTON: A couple! That's great! What was your job while you were in the service?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I was a Squad Leader for a mechanized infantry unit.

MS. NORTON: So your military service did not relate in any way to your employment with FWS?

MR. HUTCHINSON: No.

MS. NORTON: So it was just a different tour of duty and you wanted to do it because you were patriotic and an American?

MR. HUTCHINSON: No, I was drafted!

MS. NORTON: Before we go on to your career, can you tell me how, when and where you met your wife?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I met her at Michigan State. It was probably in 1967.

MS. NORTON: When and where did you get married?

MR. HUTCHINSON: We got married in Battle Creek, Michigan in June of 1968.

MS. NORTON: And you just have one child?

MS. NORTON: What is her name?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Sarah

MS. NORTON: What is she doing now? Has she been to college?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yeah, she is working for the University of Minnesota as an Auditor.

MS. NORTON: Can you tell me why you wanted to work for the Service?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I always wanted to manage wildlife ever since I was in grade school.

MS. NORTON: What was your first professional position? Was it state or federal?

MR. HUTCHINSON: It was federal. I worked as a summer student at the Shiawassee Refuge in Michigan.

MS. NORTON: So it was with FWS then?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yes.

MS. NORTON: What did you do when you started?

MR. HUTCHINSON: That summer I mostly cut weeds and did maintenance projects like that.

MS. NORTON: And learned how the refuge works, I suppose. Where did you go then from Shiawassee?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I worked for two summers there. Then when I graduated I was hired as the Assistant Manager there at Shiawassee. I was there until I was drafted. When I came out of the Army, they put me at Cassville, Wisconsin on the Upper Miss.

They don't have a station there now, but it was one of the units at the time. It's in Macgregor now.

MS. NORTON: Did you stay there until you came in to the Regional office?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Oh no, from there I went to Kofa Game Range in Arizona. I was there for a year or a year and a half. From there I went to the Area office in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. I was the Assistant Area Manager in charge of Refuges, and the state Animal Damage Control guys. I was there until they closed the offices in about 1980. Then I went to the Boston Regional office. After that I was at Bosque del Apache in New Mexico. I was Refuge Manager there for about four years. From there I went to Tishomingo Refuge in Oklahoma. Oh, I forgot one. I went from Cassville to Wichita Mountains Refuge in Oklahoma. I went from there to the Area office. From Tishomingo I went to the Regional office in Minneapolis.

MS. NORTON: When did you transfer in to Region 3?

MR. HUTCHINSON: In 1988. I stayed there until January 3, 2003.

MS. NORTON: What was your title and grade when you retired?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I was Refuge Specialist. My grade was GS-13.

MS. NORTON: When you came to work with FWS, how did you think the pay and benefits were?

MR. HUTCHINSON: A GS-5 made \$5000.00.

MS. NORTON: Well that's good! When I started a GS-3 made about \$2000.00 a year. But that's good!

MR. HUTCHINSON: I thought, "Boy, if I could make '11' I'd have it made!"

MS. NORTON: Did you socialize with any of the people that you worked with when you started at the different refuges in different places? Or, did you have recreation in the field, or anything that you participated in?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I still did a lot of hunting and fishing around the different parts of the country. I met a lot of people.

MS. NORTON: Did your career affect your family? If it did, was it negative or positive?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yeah it did! Having to move a lot and having a daughter who was just getting started in school, we'd have to move. Or my wife would have just found a job and we'd have to move.

MS. NORTON: How old were you then, when you retired?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I was 57. I just turned 58.

MS. NORTON: Well that's eligible! Agents have to retire at age 57. One of your 58-year-old agents who has been in the National Guard is over in Iraq. He is Jerry Sommers. He was our helicopter pilot in Region 3 at Peoria. Do you remember him? He is over there and we're just all praying that he'll come back safe.

MR. HUTCHINSON: I'll be darned.

MS. NORTON: What kind of training did you receive for your jobs?

MR. HUTCHINSON: There was a host of different Service training, from banding seminars to various people skills and safety and driving courses and you name it.

MS. NORTON: When you were on the different refuges, what hours did you work?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Hah! I guess whatever it took to get the job done.

MS. NORTON: Sometimes sunrise to sunset, huh?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Oh yeah!

MS. NORTON: What were your day-to-day duties when you were on the refuges?

MR. HUTCHINSON: On five of them I was the Assistant Manager and on two of them I was Manager. It varied from refuge to refuge. As an assistant it was mostly direct supervision of the maintenance crew, getting every day's jobs lined up and that sort of thing.

MS. NORTON: Did you have any special tools or instruments that you needed to use when you were doing your job?

MR. HUTCHINSON: When the computers started, that was a big change.

MS. NORTON: Was it interesting for you, to learn how to use the computer? Did you think that it helped?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yeah, it was. I think the first one was at Bosque when we used it primarily for picking hunters for a goose hunt drawing. It was a random program that would select the hunters.

MS. NORTON: On the different refuges did you work with different animals?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yeah. At Kofa it was Desert Big Horned Sheep. And at Wichita Mountains we had Buffalo and Texas Long Horned cattle and Elk. On the other refuges it was mostly waterfowl.

MS. NORTON: How did you feel toward the animals? Did your feelings change from when you first started as you worked with them longer? Did you have any feelings towards the animals?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Well not particularly.

MS. NORTON: Yet, you were happy that you were able to help them survive?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yeah, I was. They can't vote!

MS. NORTON: When you were working on the refuges what support did you receive locally, regionally or federally? Did they know what you were doing? Were there newspaper articles about different projects? Were the communities supportive of the work you were doing?

MR. HUTCHINSON: The communities were pretty supportive most of the time. At some stations I had a weekly news column in the newspaper. In other areas I did things like join the Lions Club or something like that.

MS. NORTON: How do you think the FWS was perceived by people outside of our agency?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I think that we had a definite lack of identity. I have seen that recently. Once you get out of the day-to-day stream of it you don't hardly ever hear of it.

MS. NORTON: So agency/community relations were just kind of 'so-so'?

MR. HUTCHINSON: If you are working in it day-to-day, you know what all is going on; you hear about it. But once you get out of it, it's what you can glean from the newspapers or TV; it's very small. Unless you have somebody who is currently in the Service who contacts you, you don't hear much.

MS. NORTON: What projects were you involved in?

MR. HUTCHINSON: We had an Elk transplant to Mexico from Wichita Mountains. We had some surplus Elk that we took down there. There was a big water project at Bosque that I was involved with. Before this, they had to back water in to all of the impoundments. They couldn't run water through. And when they had botulism it would especially hard to flush the units out. That was a major project of reworking the water system and putting in a new radial gate to a low flow channel. One year I went to Churchill, Manitoba on a banding assignment for Canada geese. We put radio collars on them.

MS. NORTON: Were there any major issues that you had to deal with?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yeah, the Whooping Crane at Bosque was a major issue because we tried to have a hunt at the same time. You had each hunter's blind had a radio and you'd page them when the Whooping Cranes would enter the area.

MS. NORTON: But you just kept working at it and got it resolved?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yeah, pretty much. They finally stopped the hunt after I left. It was just more of a hassle but we didn't have any shootings of Whooping Cranes when I was there.

MS. NORTON: What was the major impediment to your job or career? Was there one?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Yeah, Anita Fuller!

MS. NORTON: What was the reason, do you think?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Well I don't know! She was a trainee when I was at Wichita Mountains. She was a co-op student. And she was the Assistant when I came to Bosque for about two months. Then she ended up being the Assistant Regional Director.

MS. NORTON: Can you remember whom all of your supervisors were at all of your different stations?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Oh pretty much. Jack Frye was the first one at Shiawasse. He is the one that hired me. He is retired and alive as far as I know. Monty Dodson was the Manager out at Kofa. Roger Johnson was at Wichita Mountains. Normal Chupp at the Area Office and Wayne Gueswell was at Albuquerque. At Tishomingo it was Jim Hubert. Then when I came here it was Mack Hershbaum for a while, Dick Dolswin for a while. Tom Worthington was my supervisor when I retired.

MS. NORTON: Who were some of the individuals who helped shape your career? Do you think that there were any of your supervisors who were encouraging you to keep going up the ladder, or to stay and keep doing the good job you were doing? Or was it self-initiative?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I think that was it.

MS. NORTON: Who were some of the people that you knew outside of the Service? Do you think they would have been able to work for the Service with the knowledge and experience that they had?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I had some of the different state game rangers or C.O.s who certainly could have.

MS. NORTON: Do you remember who was President, Secretary of the Interior, or Director of FWS when you were serving?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I met Greenwalt a few times, especially when I was in the Area Office. I knew Hemphill. One I will never forget is Mike Spear. I knew Jim Gritman and Bob Burwell too.

MS. NORTON: Bob Burwell! He was a great RD! He was RD when I started in 1965! Wow! You were only twenty years old! He was a super, super guy. Most of them were really great guys. How do you think changes in administrations affected the work that we were required to do?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Quite a bit, especially when Watt was in.

MS. NORTON: Because of the money involved?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Well, his policy...of rape, plunder and pillage of the resource.

MS. NORTON: In your opinion, who were some of the individuals who helped shape the Service?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I think Greenwalt was tremendous on that. Some of the early people like Hawkbaum and Art Hawkins, Doc Green.

MS. NORTON: Did you know that Don Gray was 92 this year on Valentine's Day?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Really? I worked for Don Gray for a couple months before he retired.

MS. NORTON: He has a wonderful memory still.

MR. HUTCHINSON: He was the Manager at Upper Miss when I went in. That's when Gueswell took over.

MS. NORTON: He just has a wonderful memory. His middle initial stands for Valentine because he was born on Valentine's Day!

MR. HUTCHINSON: I knew it was Donald V. Gray.

MS. NORTON: He said he never wanted that to be known. He didn't like it but it's the name his mother wanted. He was a really great guy to interview. Can you tell me what was the high point of your career? Did you ever have a high point?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I suppose getting Bosque del Apache in New Mexico, and managing that refuge was one.

MS. NORTON: Did you have a low point?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Several!

MS. NORTON: What do you think was the most low point?

MR. HUTCHINSON: One of them was when I had to leave there, there was a Black Bear which had come down out of the mountains and was tearing up the bee hives. So just like all of the other Managers before me, we called the State, they called a trapper and they came and shot the bear. Mike Spear heard that and moved me. That's when I went to Tishomingo.

MS. NORTON: Was that for your safety that they moved you?

MR. HUTCHINSON: No! He did think I should have done that.

MS. NORTON: I see, they didn't like that you had done that. And this wasn't something that made you happy?

MR. HUTCHINSON: No! My wife had a good job there and was running the conference center at the college. She liked that. It was pretty bleak after that.

MS. NORTON: What do you wish you had done differently in that situation?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Probably not had the bear shot I guess. But that was standard procedure up until then.

MS. NORTON: Did you consider that a dangerous or frightening experience?

MR. HUTCHINSON: No.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever have a dangerous or frightening experience at any of the stations where you worked?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Not particularly. You were out alone a lot, working with duck hunters. There was potential for it to be dangerous.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever had anyone threaten you with a gun, or have a boating accident when you were out on treacherous waters, or anything like that?

MR. HUTCHINSON: No. I took out a lower unit a couple of times.

MS. NORTON: What was your most humorous experience?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I guess the one that I recall is when Matt Hershbaum was with me. We had a girl's conservation camp in Wisconsin. They would come down to Cassville every year and we'd put on a banding demonstration. We'd shoot the cannon net out from the maintenance shop. We had just purchased some new rockets. We had never used them before. We had them set up right near the fiberglass doors. We figured we put a plywood sign up there just to protect them [the girls] a little. We shot that off and the back blast hit the cement apron and bounced up and cut that board right in two and threw it through the fiberglass door! I looked at Matt and he looked at me, we couldn't believe it!

MS. NORTON: So you thought that was humorous, and not dangerous?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Well, at the time, yeah!

MS. NORTON: What do you like to tell others about your career and about the FWS?

MR. HUTCHINSON: It was doing something that I loved to do. We had such different scenery and different resources to work with.

MS. NORTON: How did you feel that the FWS was, to work for?

MR. HUTCHINSON: For the most part, it was pretty good. Some of it was not so good.

MS. NORTON: What were some of the changes that you noticed in the Service during your career?

MR. HUTCHINSON: When I started most of the people were white males. Most of them hunted or fished or at least tolerated it. But as time went on you got a lot of people who not only don't hunt and fish, but don't like it and don't think we should be doing it. You get a lot of different attitudes to deal with.

MS. NORTON: Did you ever notice any changes in the Service in terms of personnel or the environment? Did you notice a change then, from when you first started from mostly white males?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Oh yeah, diversity was the name of the game for several years. You really had to justify hiring a white male, if you couldn't find anybody else.

MS. NORTON: Did you feel that it was other cultures or races, or sex? What was the difference that you noticed?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I think we were forcing the issue on some of them. Especially for blacks, and Native Americans. They were forced into an area that was far from home, and not many others [of the same ilk] were around. It was pretty hard on them, to be thrown in to an all white community in a small farming town, which is where most of the refugees were. I am not so sure that some of those didn't take the job because they just wanted a job, not necessarily a FWS job.

MS. NORTON: What are your thoughts on the future? Where do you see the Service heading in the next decade?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I don't know, it's going to be...

MS. NORTON: Do you think it's changed a lot? If so, in what ways?

MR. HUTCHINSON: There are a lot of people saying that we don't take care of what we've got. But then at the same time, you don't make new land. I think we should continue to purchase what we can but at the same time, there is a lot of land out there going unmanaged. There just isn't the finances to do it.

MS. NORTON: Do you have any documents or photographs that you would like to donate or share with the Archives along with this tape?

MR. HUTCHINSON: I've got some old patches that I could give you.

MS. NORTON: Oh, that would be great! Is there anybody else that you feel we should interview, that we haven't? I've done quite a few, but sometimes there's a name I've never even heard of.

MR. HUTCHINSON: I can't think of any that you haven't already.

MS. NORTON: Okay. Well that just about wraps it up Bill. That was pretty easy wasn't it? I want to thank you for your time. Would you like to have a copy of this when it's typed up?

MR. HUTCHINSON: Not necessarily.

MS. NORTON: Okay. Thanks a lot Bill!